

THIRD PRIZE

Royal Empire Essay Competition

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Class A: Do you agree that the British Commonwealth and Empire is getting stronger rather than weaker?

Scheme

- 1). The changes that have taken place in Pakistan.
- 2). India's Republic Status, and Ceylon's dominion Status, Burma's withdrawal from the Commonwealth.
- 3). The unrest in Africa.
- 4). Disturbances in the Caribbean area, Pros & cons on Federation.
- 5). Britain's own signs of weakness: her economic affairs.

On contrast, there are these signs of strength in the Commonwealth:

- 6). Canada's industrial power and her attachment to the Commonwealth.
- 7). Australia and New Zealand's growth, and acceptance of their responsibilities.
- 8). Britain's ^{comparatively} quick recovery from the effects of the war.
- 9). Expansion of the Commonwealth has ceased, but Britain must be prepared to support its members should they need help.
- 10). What keeps the unity within the Commonwealth - the monarchy, and the co-operativeness of its members.
- 11). The new era into which the Commonwealth is opening and the changes that must necessarily take place - if the members of it can accept them, then strength will continue unimpaired.

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Class A: Do you agree that the British Commonwealth and Empire is getting stronger rather than weaker?

Should a man from Mass land once again on the earth — his last visit having been paid fifty years previously — he would no doubt say that the British Empire and Commonwealth was decreasing in size and consequently growing weaker. Pakistan presents the most recent example of change; after her terrible economic slump in 1952 and 1953 as a result of the sharp fall in the prices of jute and cotton; after her urgent problem of food shortage in those same years when she had to import 800,000 and 1,500,000 tons of wheat respectively; and after the statement of her Prime Minister, Mohammed Ali, that he looks to Great Britain and other members of the Commonwealth for help both in technical and financial matters; ^{she} has now sufficiently found her feet to declare at the conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London on February 4th of this year, that she will become a Republic as India did in 1949, remaining in the Commonwealth and accepting Queen Elizabeth not as sovereign of Pakistan but head of the Commonwealth and the "symbol of the free association of its independent members".

One man from Mass will realize that, changes have taken place in Asia, ~~the~~ India has been a Republic for the past five years, and he considers that this action of not recognizing the Queen as sovereign shows a deterioration of love and respect for the monarchy — love and respect which are feelings essential in the close holding together of the Commonwealth. Pakistan has already followed India's path of action and if, say, the other dominions followed suit, the Commonwealth would be shattered. Also, one man from Mass does not consider the rising to the status of dominion a good thing — these dominions can so easily grow away from the mother country. Yet since his last visit, Ceylon, a comparatively small island, has become an independent state; while Burma in the late 1940's left the Commonwealth altogether.

Then again, there is unrest in Africa — particularly in

the east. Here, land shortage has given rise to a desperate state of affairs. The population is ever-increasing and the soil none too fertile. The natives are uneducated and cannot see the dangers of burning down forests to provide themselves with land, which they cultivate carelessly, moving on afterwards to find fresh soil. Uganda and Kenya are particular examples where there has been unrest and in Kenya, this unrest has produced serious results. This colony is still in an unsettled condition - the Mau Mau have, to some extent, been suppressed and many of them have been caught and punished. But we still read frequently of attacks made by the Mau Mau natives on English settlers. If this then is the state of affairs in Africa, something must be wrong with the relationships between the natives and the British, and bad feeling between two parts of the Commonwealth does nothing to show that the latter is growing stronger.

Signs of unrest have appeared among the British possessions in the Caribbean. Last year, Dr. Jagan, leader of the People's Progressive Party, the party in power in British Guiana, tried to use his influence to turn his country communistic - this only about six months after British Guiana had been granted her new constitution - which, naturally enough, was removed right away and Dr. Jagan ousted from power.

For some years past, the British West Indies have been seeking federation and then independence. This they have not yet achieved though they are near their goal. Another instance of an area seeking dominion status, one man from Mass thinks, and wonders, with us if it will be a good thing. None of the British West Indian islands are financially secure and if federation has to wait till they all are, it will never come into being. Risks will have to be taken in any case, but the question is the choosing of the right moment when the risks will be the smallest and the advantages the most apparent. The choice of the right moment for action, however, will be mere guesswork, and if the choice occurs when there is a large extent of talent available for undertaking the workings of the federation, luck will be with us. Those who advocate West Indian federation say that it will ease economic conditions when all the islands can join together and work for their general good. Naturally, financial aid will have to be sought from Britain for perhaps the first ten years, but after that, the federated islands will stand on their own feet. A criticism against this argument is that when federation comes to pass, talents which could have concentrated on improving the individual colonies will

be diverted to yet one more governmental structure, and that ten years may not be sufficient to enable the West Indies to settle and build up their finances. It is difficult to see at such close range how, if it comes to pass, Federation will work out - only time can tell.

As if these instances of financial insecurity, unrest amounting to rebellion in some parts, and breaking away from the sovereignty are not enough to convince the Martian Man at first glance that the Commonwealth is growing weaker, there is Britain's own economic situation: she is financially dependent on the United States. To take another example of her weakness, she no longer has the largest navy in the world. Yet she is the mother country, and if she weakens, surely it follows that the rest of the Commonwealth must weaken too.

This decision that the Commonwealth is growing weaker is reached by the Martian Man only after his first hurried glance at the world and world affairs. Should he stay longer, closer inspection would show him that his first impression was not necessarily the correct one, and that there are arguments to support the belief - which I agree with - that the Commonwealth is growing stronger rather than weaker. He will see the other side to the picture.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand have also achieved dominion status during his absence but they have had it longer than any of the aforementioned countries. They have developed and increased in population and industrial power and present a much more formidable appearance than they did at the beginning of the century. And as they developed and matured, their concept of the Commonwealth altered. Canada particularly has grown in industrial power and is still expanding and developing in new fields. But apart from these outward signs of her increasing strength, she possesses three sources of national unity which have developed over the years in which the visitor from Mars has been absent. Canada has become of age but has no desire to leave her family of the Commonwealth. During the last war and after it, Canada accepted the full weight of her responsibilities in the international field - a thing which she would hardly have contemplated before 1939. She has grown up sufficiently to be eager to find ways in which she may share international responsibilities without jeopardizing her own national freedom. She does not need to assert her nationhood - she takes it for granted, and at the same time remains deeply attached to the Commonwealth.

The attitude of Australia and New Zealand towards the

Commonwealth has also changed. Before they came of age, their chief external association was with the United Kingdom — not with each other and still less with other members of the Commonwealth. This relation between homeland and colony was what held them to the Commonwealth before the First World War. At this time, they were only colonies and when Britain declared war on Germany, all her dependencies automatically became at war with that country. Nevertheless, the response given by Australia and New Zealand surprised other members of the Commonwealth — they were surprised that the sons of British stock, wherever they were, were so ready to give spontaneous help. It was even a greater surprise to the enemy. Out of this war, by the Statute of Westminster in 1931, grew the concept of Dominion status, with Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia being considered sovereign dominions on equal status with the United Kingdom. This changed the attitude towards the Commonwealth. Australia and New Zealand could look towards one another and towards other members of the Commonwealth as much as towards the homeland. Proof of the fact that dominion status did not cause the independent countries to grow away from the Commonwealth was given in the Second World War. At this time, each dominion had to declare war on Germany and Japan should she want to join the war. Needless to say, Australia and New Zealand came forward right away with troops, just as Canada did, and lent able assistance to the United Kingdom. They too showed a great sense of responsibility, and the effect on the Commonwealth was good. The South Pacific Commission was set up which strengthened relations within the Commonwealth and co-operation between the Commonwealth and some certain leading nations. The Colombo Plan again showed evidence of the desire of Australia and New Zealand to co-operate with other parts of the Commonwealth. Canada too, is an important factor in this, and it shows the desire of all the older Commonwealth dominions to lend a helping hand to the newer Commonwealth countries.

The fact that these older dominions choose to remain within the big family recognizing the Queen as their sovereign, even though they are quite at liberty to withdraw, gives plain evidence of a strength within the Commonwealth. They do not consider that the republic status of India and Pakistan, and Ceylon's independent status, will have a weakening effect. Rather, they feel that the Commonwealth is today probably the strongest bridge between free Asia and the West, and they fully approve and welcome the different relations between these countries and

the rest of the Commonwealth, and are particularly anxious to give aid to these Asian countries for this reason: they wish to show free Asia that the democratic way of life is preferable to the communistic; and these new independents will need help at first to develop their economies. If they are left to go their own way, they will not only weaken themselves but also the whole of the Commonwealth.

As regards the weakness of Britain herself, it is only natural that of all the Commonwealth countries, she emerged, after six years of the Second World War, the weakest and most strained, but without losing her vitality and the unity which existed throughout the Commonwealth. Britain had been forced to give up her development. At the end of the war, she had no full-scale plant for the development of atomic energy from the raw materials to the finished product, as America had. Now, she has. She had had to abandon the development and manufacture of new types of large aircraft with the result that when peace was restored she was years behind America. But by diverting scarce resources from her immediate needs, she took action, the result of which has been seen in the last two or three years: her engines and some of her aircraft lead the world. Her economic resources which were drained to the lowest ebb after the Second World War, are now on the uprise. These instances of Britain's vitality and will to improve her lot surely belie the statement that she is growing weaker.

Expansion of the Commonwealth can be said to have ceased. Britain, the mother country, no longer holds such a large part in the direct sway and authority over the world as she held in the last two reigns. A great deal of the wealth by which she traded and invested has gone. She has to reconquer her prestige and justify her claims to leadership, and not ~~set~~ sit back and rely on her past glory. In her attempt not to suppress the other members of the Commonwealth, she must not go to the other extreme and do nothing towards encouraging ^{them} and making them feel that they can turn to her for help. Even though expansion has ceased, progress can still continue, and Britain with her past experience in doing her thirteen colonies in America for example, can work out her problems in both Africa and Asia with the lesson learnt always kept in mind.

As has been said already, with the growth of independence among her colonies, Britain has lost much of her authority over the world. Yet there is a closer unity among the members of this Commonwealth which stretches into every

continent and embraces lands of most diverse geography and peoples of many creeds and colours. The sovereign, as head of the Commonwealth, has much to do with the preservation of this unity. Since the monarch does no actual ruling governing, he does not make mistakes and retains the people's love and faith in his wisdom. Those who make mistakes are the ministers and these can be removed and others returned to power, and when mistakes are made there is no resentment against the sovereign. A monarch seems essential to a country's peoples — they need someone whom they can always love and acknowledge as their head. France, Germany and Russia, and England in the days of Cromwell, all tried to do away with the monarchy and just have a ruling party — and all failed in the ends they meant to achieve. The Commonwealth, with the sovereign of its independent member countries at its head, has a far greater chance of surviving and growing stronger than any of these other countries had. The Commonwealth also has high ideals and as much as possible tries to carry them out. After the first Prime Minister's conference which he attended in 1962, Mohammed Ali, Prime of Palastan said, "In a divided world the Commonwealth stands out as a shining example of international good-will and co-operation". More than any other nation, the Commonwealth has made contributions to the protection of the peace. She has been able to take her losses in her stride and not remain at enmity with those to whom she has lost her possessions. And most obvious of all is the co-operation existing among members of the Commonwealth to which reference has already been made. They are willing to work together and to see each other's point of view. Above all, they are friendly one to another.

The Commonwealth is opening out on a new era. She has been able to adjust herself to most of the changes, and has come out victorious in two world wars. As one man from Mass departs, he bears in mind the fact that the members of the Commonwealth in Asia and Africa, where most tension is to be found, and which are perhaps the weakest links in the chain of the Commonwealth, are still in the adolescent stage and when they reach maturity as Canada, Australia and New Zealand have done, they should have their affairs in a more settled state. So long as the Commonwealth remains in step with the changes that inevitably will come to pass, she should be able to preserve her strength and influence which are once again on the increase, and face the future with hope and confidence.

Reference Books: "British West Indies" by W. L. Burn. Articles from "The Listener".